

HARPSIGFORD



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HARPSICHORD

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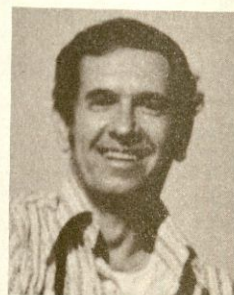
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GO FOR BAROQUE

by *Hal Haney*

THE COVER

Our engraved cover first appeared as the frontpiece to the 1738 London edition of "The Delightful Grove" or the "British Musical Miscellany."



The "Delightful Grove" was a collection of popular songs for voice with obbligato and continuo. Composers represented in this miscellany include Carey, Leveridge, Handel and other "esteemed masters." The copy was prepared from the original now owned by I.H.S. member John H. Burkhalter III of Center Harbor, N.H. The engraving is attributed to the famous eighteenth century artist George Bickham. There is another engraving which has a remarkable resemblance to this one in the Rare Book Division of the New York Public Library. The New York engraving is known to be the work of George Bickham. While there are several technical errors in the engraving, the curved bow is not one of them. Curved bows were once used so all four strings could be played at the same time producing a beautiful ensemble effect.

I received a telephone call the other evening from I.H.S. member Hilda Jonas and while it is always a joy to hear her sunny voice, it was especially so this time because she had details of her summer harpsichord festival. Hilda has been the talented force behind harpsichord festivals for a number of years at Put-in-Bay, as well as California and Cincinnati, Ohio. She has been heard in concerts with major orchestras both in this country and abroad. Just recently she con-

cluded an all-Bach recital at the New York Cultural Center.

Her summer festival will be held at her studio, 3942 Ledgewood Drive on August 29, 30, 31. The subjects are (1) J. S. Bach "Well-Tempered Clavier" and (2) Contemporary Music. There will be seven sessions in all. Two of them will be devoted exclusively to contemporary music which will include Variations and Absences by Hans Werner Henze, Partita by D. Pinkham, Suite by Gordon Jacobs, Variations and Sonata by V. Rieti and others. Five sessions will be devoted to the W.T.C. They plan to cover 5 preludes and Fugues at each session so a total of 25 to 30 will be discussed. Some better known ones will be given less time, and some less known ones will be the center of attention. These will be taken from both Volume I and Volume II. You should call or write to Miss Jonas for registration information.

A number of members have expressed a desire to attend music festivals or summer "master classes," yet indicate a fear that these gatherings are only for polished professionals. This is not at all so. In some cases it is possible to audit a seminar without even knowing how to play. Many of them do not require a degree in music performance, but simply require a well-developed interest in the subject being studied. If one is taking a course for college credit, that of course, is another matter.

Miss Jonas' festival can serve as a good example. Here the emphasis is placed on interpretation and performance. The basic requirement is that you have the mechanics of playing out of the way. By that, I mean that you should be able to play the pieces being studied at least reasonably well. The finishing touches will come from the festival. It is generally not required that you perform before an outside audience, although when this option does exist for you, it is to your advantage to accept it with enthusiasm. Sharing your talents with others is a wonderful experience and it helps you grow as an artist.

Some time ago I learned of an

interesting restoration job done by I.H.S. member Aldei Gregoire. I discovered that Aldei had written a detailed article about the project which was now owned by Music Journal. After a search for the Journal (they had moved from the address I had, seventeen years ago) I was able to contact Editor Robert Cumming and received permission to print the article in full. It is an interesting story and begins on page 14.

I received some sad news from the City of Denver the other day in the form of a newspaper article which indicated that our Harpsichord office is located smack-dab in the middle of an area which is to be torn down to make room for Olympic press housing. The large, mature trees, historically important buildings and delightful courtyard (where I am now writing this) may be replaced with steel and glass, much like the downtown section of many similar American cities. One daily paper visited us here and wrote a 2-page story on our building, the Harpsichord Society and uniqueness of this island in the heart of the city, but planners do not seem to think in terms of people but in terms of projects, especially where federal funds are involved. I have a feeling the bulldozers are not far away. Losing our little paradise will not affect the magazine, but it will affect our budget. In five and a half years, the Society (which occupies 1,054 square feet) has never had to pay rent, only utilities and telephone, and I doubt that we can find another landlord as sympathetic to our cause.

Madame H. de Chambure, President of Musée Instrumental du Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique, France, wrote to us the other day with news of a new organization which might be of interest to members. At its Paris meeting last August 1971, the Comité International des Musées et Collections d'Instruments de Musique recognized the growing interest in ancient musical instruments and decided to form the International Association of Musical Instrument Collections which would be an ICOM Association. All museums and other public

institutions with musical instrument collections are entitled to become institutional members, with one vote each, and all staff of these institutions, (whether curators, restorers, research or lecturing assistants) are entitled to become voting members as well. Musicians, instrument makers and restorers, and private collectors may also join, but will have no vote. A newsletter will be issued which will contain news of collections, exhibitions and other activities in the field. Membership is \$3 (U.S.) or 1 pound 20 (British). Send requests for membership and money to Mrs. Jean Jenkins, IAMIC, Horniman Museum, London SE 23, England.

Hal Haney

SYMPATHETIC VIBRATIONS

AN AMERICAN IN PARIS

by Wallace Zuckermann



Like Gertrude Stein, Hemingway, Dos Passos and so many other Americans before him, William Dowd is fascinated by the city of Paris. The venerable co-founder

of the "Boston School" in harpsichord making first came to Paris to measure instruments at the Conservatoire National, the famous collection presided over by voluble Mme de Chambure, mostly referred to as "The Countess." Dowd looked around Paris and liked what he saw. In this age of urban disasters, Paris is a city that still works as a city. There is beauty and grandeur in its wide boulevards and little winding streets, its cathedrals, parks and museums. In spite of underground garages in front of many monuments, in spite of the expressway along the Seine, in spite of the ring of shabby modern apartment blocks which surround the

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city, and in spite of the phenomenally high prices, Paris is still Paris . . . the queen of all cities.

Looking at all this, Dowd had the happy notion of locating a branch of his Boston shop here. His timing was perfect; France at the moment, has no harpsichord makers to speak of. With Pleyel out of action, there is only the activity around the Conservatoire, with Hubert Bedart and Anthony Sidey making and restoring instruments on a small scale. Bedart also designs kit models which are marketed by the music publishers Heugel. It was through Heugel that Dowd met the man who turns out the Bedart kit parts . . . a German named Reinhardt Von Nagel, who lives in Paris, has an American wife, and speaks English fluently. Dowd walked into Von Nagel's shop, looked at his work, and convinced him to embark on the first European Dowd.

I had heard vague rumors about this operation: it was the Renault of the harpsichord world, a gigantic plant with the latest machinery, turning out the finest instruments in mass production quantities. So it was with some trepidation that I approached one of the oldest quarters of Paris, in which exists one of the densest concentration of cabinet shops and furniture factories in Europe.

The place turned out to be difficult to find, and only the clue "F 75" let me into the third interior courtyard of what may have been an ancient residence or chapel. There I found a small, light workshop which gave the impression of a conservatory, a glass house attached to the main building, containing a workbench, some hand tools neatly hung on the wall, and Paris Dowd No. 1, complete with a harpsichordist playing, Von Nagel listening, and Dowd himself at that very moment telephoning.

A Renault plant it is not. But there was more to the operation than finishing shop in which I found myself. There was Von Nagel's furniture workshop, one courtyard removed, with some respectable machinery and skilled and eager workmen. So eager indeed, that on that day, which was

some kind of bank holiday, two workmen came in and worked for nothing, just to finish the instrument!

The instrument itself was done to a high standard; it was as good or better than any instrument I have seen. The action especially was superb. The keyboards were on light frames, and the upper keyboard slide in and out at just a light touch. The keys themselves were light and beautifully balanced; the registers were leather covered and noiseless. The spacing was clean, neat, even, an aesthetic pleasure to look at because one knew at a glance that this thing was going to work and sound as well as a harpsichord can.

I had hardly expressed my admiration when it was time for lunch, and boss, secretary, workmen, harpsichordist, hanger-on, and myself repaired to a bistro where we wine and dined a small fortune away, enough I should have thought, to serve as a deposit on Dowd No. 2.

I spent the afternoon talking to Von Nagel. He seemed pleasant, generous, with a good sense of humor. His workmen don't particularly enjoy working on the kit parts since they don't see the finished product. On the Dowds they are the creators, and they love it. There certainly won't be any problem selling these instruments in Europe, since no other instruments of that quality are made on the continent. But their quantities are likely to be small, since Dowd personally insists on working on them and doing the final voicing. After all, the shop is an excuse to spend some time in Paris, so why not? Dowd hopes that his Paris shop, like his Boston one, will start a "school" here where it is badly needed. The interest is there and already young Frenchmen "hang around" the shop. This is by far the best way to spread good harpsichord making around the world, and now some of the other good makers should open branches in Germany, Canada, South America, Scandinavia, and possibly even some of the eastern countries.

Wallace Zuckermann
Stafford Barton, England



There have been many happy moments in my life since I became associated with "The Harpsichord", but one of the most memorable was discovering that Claude Jean Chiasson was still alive.

This discovery will amuse those of you who have known Chiasson for years and are well aware that he enjoys superb health, has a very full schedule building harpsichords, teaching, concertising and recording and has just reached the prime of his life. My ignorance developed over a number of years and was somewhat related to the high position this man holds, not only in my mind, but the minds of noted people I have interviewed. Harpsichord builder William Dowd mentioned to me that, years ago, the first harpsichord he heard in person, was played by Claude Jean Chiasson. I recall Frank Hubbard saying that the first contemporary instrument he ever examined was built by Claude Jean Chiasson. John Challis told me he knew Chiasson as both a performing artist and harpsichord builder back when John had his first shop in Ypsalanti, before he moved to Detroit and long before he moved to New York. All spoke well of him although only Challis indicated knowing him personally. It seemed to me that Claude Jean Chiasson was something of a legend. A man of his knowledge and influence who was one of the first harpsichord builders in 20th century America, must certainly have, by now, found that lost chord that Sullivan wrote about.

Some time later, I was going through our membership files and came across the name C. J. Chiasson. "Could this be Claude Jean Chiasson?" I asked myself. Believing that

CONVERSATION

**With Builder-
Harpsichordist**

Claude Jean Chiasson

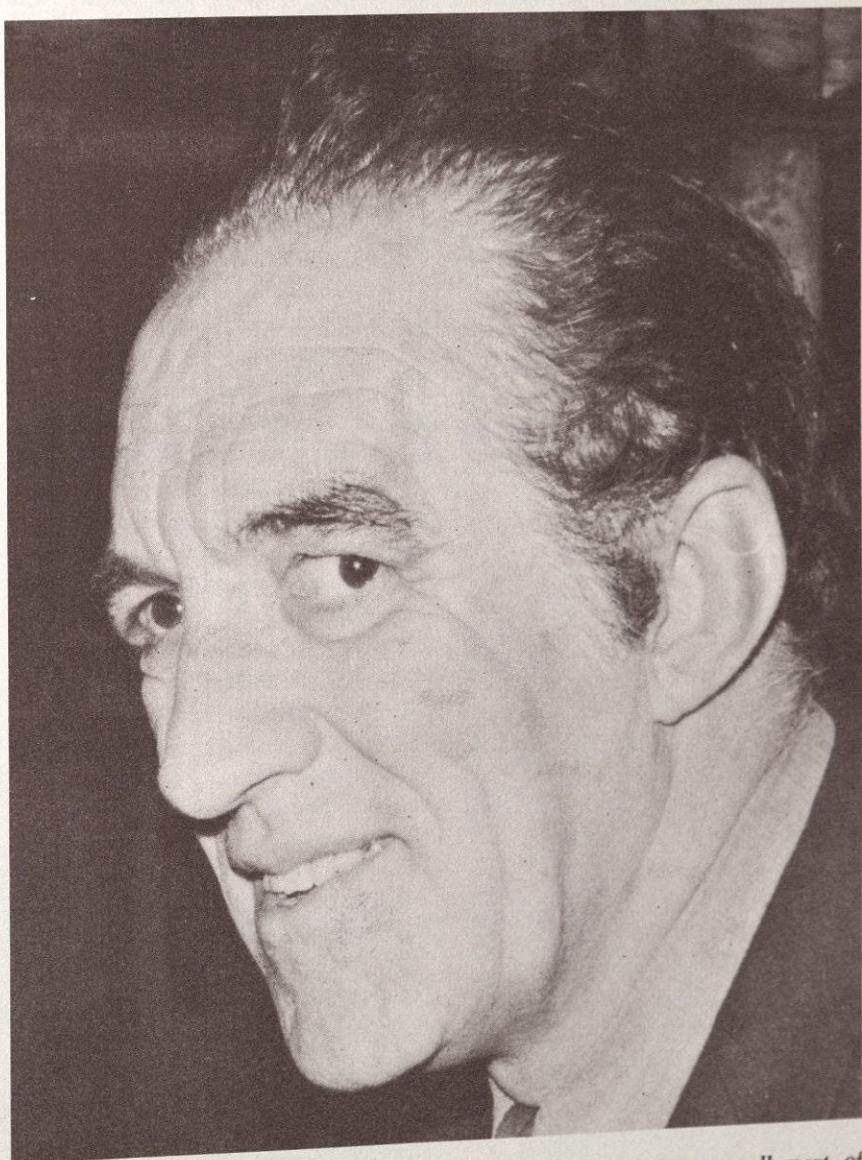
it could not be, I went on with the job at hand. Months went by and the possibility that our C. J. Chiasson might actually be Claude Jean Chiasson kept popping up at odd moments of the day, or night, usually when I was involved in other duties remote from the Society office.

Finally, during a visit with John Challis, I asked him about Chiasson and he assured me he was alive and well and working in New Jersey. He even gave me his address, 17 Hollywood Avenue, Fairfield, N. J. I was delighted with the news and called Chiasson the next day.

A strong and youthful voice answered my ring and when I asked for Mr. Chiasson I was surprised to learn I was talking with him. An appointment was set up and a few days later I was on a bus to New Jersey. We passed through town after town separated by beautiful green fields, cool forests and rock escarpments. These towns were joined by a winding road which I feel certain was placed there long before there were such things as electricity and automobiles.

Since Chiasson lives outside of town, he had arranged to meet me at the bus stop. Since this was the end of the line, only a few people were left on the bus when we pulled alongside the small one room station. As the other passengers were picked up by friends, a brilliant red foreign sports car screeched to a halt across the street and a tall, athletic man alighted and crossed over to where I was standing. With extended hand and a big smile, he introduced himself as Claude Jean Chiasson.

Within minutes we were speeding along a winding country road, past farms and well-tended fields toward his home. I don't believe I ever told



him that at one time I thought he was dead. This very idea now seems so remote. Claude Jean Chiasson has so much vitality and enthusiasm and lives such an active life, it is difficult to keep up with him.

His home is a beautifully designed structure with well-proportioned lines set among large mature trees, and attractively arranged flower gardens. The back patio overlooks an endless ex-

ppanse of yard and trees, all part of his property. Ceramic bird feeders hang from half a dozen trees and formal marble steps and sculpture compliment the informal woodland which surrounds the site. His workshop is located in a large basement which is equipped with an impressive array of tools and work area.

After taking a tour of the grounds, and playing several of his instruments

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(which I found to be of excellent quality, both as to construction and sound production) we sat down in his sunny livingroom and I started the interview with both a statement and a question.

HANEY: Your name deserves, and will get, a permanent place in the history of the harpsichord revival because you were very much a part of it. In fact, you were a very lonely part of it for a long time. How did it all start?

CHIASSON: I knew you would ask that question so I have been marshaling those facts. I was brought up in Cambridge. I lived in Cambridge and went to Cambridge schools before going away to prep school. When I was about 12 years old I was taken to the fine arts museum and we happened to hit the music instrument collection and saw their Kirkman harpsichord. I fell in love with the harpsichord then but didn't know it yet.

At 18 I came home from prep school and was studying piano at the conservatory under Jesus Maria Sanroma and there arrived from Paris a Mr. Putnam Aldrich, not yet doctor. Putnam Aldrich was a full-fledged, thoroughly trained pupil of Landowska. He had studied with her in Paris from 1929 through 1933 and brought with him his Pleyel harpsichord. He and Alfred Zighera founded the Boston Society of Ancient Instruments so he could be near Harvard and work on his doctorate. There was an article in the Boston paper which contained a photograph of the Pleyel so I had to get in touch with him. I was already a church organist at this time at Notre Dame in North Cambridge. Already I owned a few little 10" 78 rpm recordings of Landowska's first public work, the Harmonious Blacksmith, Wolsey's Wilde etc. That is a masterpiece. It still sends me.

One thing led to another and I became Aldrich's pupil. He proceeded to give me the works! Everything he had received from Landowska. He had already an M.A. from Yale. I

studied every phase of music with him . . . harmony, counterpoint, figured bass, continuo playing at sight . . . the works! I was most fortunate. And most of it I didn't pay for. I took it out in tunings, cleaning the apartment and things of that nature. He had a little apartment in Boston which was also the rehearsal room for the Ancient Instrument Society. The Society was made up of gamba, viola d' amore and instruments of that nature. The players were Boston Symphony people who owned ancient instruments. It was a nice little society. The flutest was the fabulous George Laurent who was Kussevitsky's first flutest.

During the Harvard tercentenary they repaired the William Gray, London, cabinet organ made in 1805 or 10. I gave three concerts on the instrument for the tercentenary. At one of the concerts a distinguished gentleman came to me after I had finished and said "I am William Lyman Johnson. I knew Dolmetsch and I have two Dolmetsch instruments at home. Are you interested in that sort of thing?"

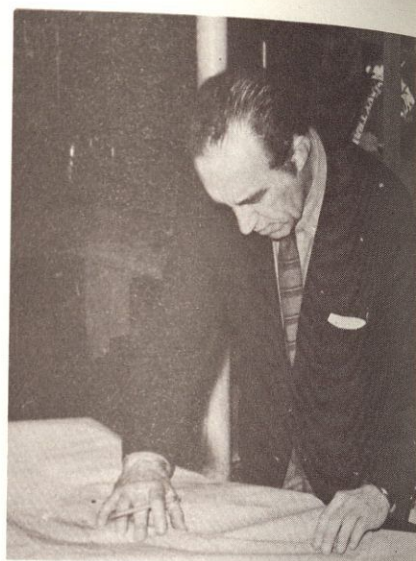
"Am I?" I replied with enthusiasm. "By all means!"

He smiled and said "I have a virginal and a small triangular spinet in my house. Would you like to come and see them? They need a lot of repair, can you do that sort of thing?"

I told him that I could try. I went to his house and ended up repairing the Flemish type virginals, they had the seahorse patterned papers for decor, and the spinetto. I visited him many times and even borrowed the instruments and played in Cambridge on what, at that time, were considered "funny little instruments." This led to a new adventure for me.

I went to the Fine Arts Museum and told them I wanted to repair their Kirkman and put it into playing condition. Mr. Johnson stood up for me in relating my competence as a repair man who knew what he was doing. And it happened.

The museum hired me as a regular worker. I went in at 9 o'clock and checked out at 5 and I worked on that Kirkman until it was finished.



Constantly on the alert to improve his product, Chiasson checks over one of his drawings for an instrument now in the planning stages.

HANEY: How long did it take you to restore the Kirkman?

CHIASSON: Almost two seasons. It was ready to give a concert the following April. I started in September and the following April I gave a concert on it . . . mostly English music or music that might plausibly have been known and played in London at the time the instrument was built. I played Hayden, Bach, Bull etc. Although Bull would have been completely out of fashion at the time. There would have been no Bull during late Kirkman.

But getting back to the instrument, as I repaired and restored it, drawings were made of each piece, the bracing, etc., and those drawings were the basis on which I built my first instrument . . . the large instrument which is sometimes referred to as "the monster". I added more space and another bridge, ala Pleyel, and designed a 16 foot choir. That became Chiasson Harpsichord No. 1. Complete with lute stop ala Kirkman and 16 foot ala Pleyel with a hole in the 8' bridge for the strings to go through. Fools rush in where angels very will might fear to tread . . . and do fear to tread. In the meantime something else happened.

The museum asked me to stay on and head the Sunday afternoon

recitals. Every other Sunday afternoon there was a concert in the tapestry room at the top of this magnificent staircase. Very much like the set-up at the Met except at the top of the staircase there was a huge and beautiful tapestry hall which was lovely for concerts. These concerts had a very strong emphasis on early music. We had many guest artists playing recorder, virginal, gamba and things of that type. I was not only director of these concerts but I took over most of the keyboard work that might be involved.

HANEY: *At what time did this all take place?*

CHIASSON: I think the monster was built in 1938. I played it in the museum a number of times and I believe it was around 1940 that I became concert director. I stayed there for two seasons and then went into the Air Force.

HANEY: *Tell me how you approached the physical problems of building such a large and complex instrument as your very first harpsichord.*

CHIASSON: Well Bessaraboff, who authored that beautiful book **Ancient European Musical Instruments**, was

right over my head in the museum. He was fascinated by what I was doing. We tried all kinds of instruments and decided that some could be repaired and some could not. But during this we made drawings. Bessaraboff was a magnificent draftsman. He was a trained architectural draftsman and he made complete drawings of the Kirkman as I took it apart. These were then adopted, as I mentioned earlier, to produce my "monster". I was very fortunate in having two friends who knew a great deal more than I did about what was required to build such an instrument. One of these was Bessaraboff. He was a finished technician.

HANEY: *Did you build this in the museum, or did you have your own workshop at the time?*

CHIASSON: We started it in Mr. Bessaraboff's house. He had a capacious house with a huge dining room which he didn't use. This became my workshop for a time. Later, it went to the cellar of another house which also had a very large room. This was owned by a friend of mine who had some machinery and tools as well. It was finished there.

HANEY: *This, then, was one of the first contemporary instruments to be built in the United States. Is this so?*

CHIASSON: Other than Challis. I did not know Challis at the time and had not even corresponded with him. I had never seen a Challis instrument. We did meet later on and I will tell you of that in a moment.

Another occurrence which influenced me very much was that I was introduced to Julius Wahl through a piano teacher friend in Boston. I went out to Welsley and met Mr. Wahl. There was a clavichord there which I greatly admired. And as it developed, Mr. Wahl and I became very good friends. A few years later, Wahl became the curator and caretaker of the Bell Skinner Collection, when it was the Bell Skinner Collection in Holyoke. Putnam Aldrich and I went out there several times. One of the stipulations in Bell Skinner's will was that these instruments must be playable at all times for anyone who was qualified to play them. Not that I was qualified with a capitol Q but I was interested and that is what she wanted those instruments left for . . . to help people precisely like me perhaps. We visited and stayed with the Wahls. We were very very impressed with the beautiful tone of the Ruckers double and I was very impressed with the Hass which had the 16 foot choir of strings. That was another very strong contributing factor in this whole picture.

Just about at the time the "monster" was finished, playable and in my studio in Cambridge near Harvard Square, a young man came to me and introduced himself. He told me that he was at Phillips Andover Academy and owned a Neupert Clavichord which he became interested in after attending concerts by the Trapp Family Singers. He indicated that he would be at Harvard the following year and wanted to know if I took pupils.

Well, I did take pupils and later on, in September, when he got squared away, he came back and said "I'm here! I want harpsichord lessons."

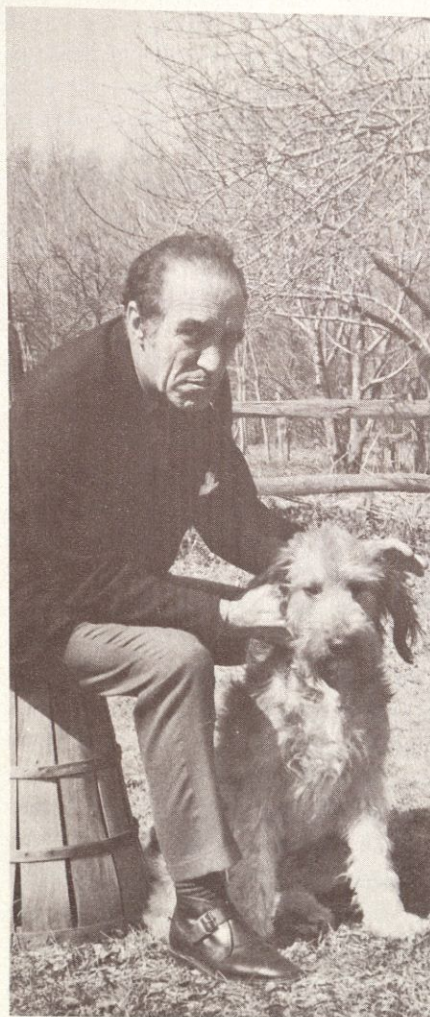


Chiasson plays one of his two-manual instruments located in his livingroom. Note the turned legs. This particular instrument includes 16', 8' and 4' choirs of strings.

That is how Daniel Pinkham became my pupil.

In the course of time, he bought a small Challis harpsichord. Not only did he receive the instrument, but Challis came out with it to see that it was in good order and also to visit Melville Smith, an old friend of his who, in the meantime, had become director of the Longines School of Music.

The name Melville Smith should mean a great deal to us all. He was very important in encouraging interest in Baroque music. He did much research and passed this on to all of us. He was an old and very dear friend of Challis'. John stayed with Melville during this trip. As a matter of in-



Claude Jean Chiasson takes a moment from his busy schedule to enjoy his pet dog. This photo was taken in Chiasson's "back yard" which stretches into the background as far as the eye can see. Other pets include two cats (one of them, is three-legged and can be seen sitting on the rail fence) and a crow.

terest, the little harpsichord John was delivering was taken to Melville's house and we had a grand party that evening.

The next day, John visited me and "the monster" and John and I became friends and have remained so over these many years. That was my first introduction both to Challis and a Challis instrument.

HANEY: *This meeting then was rather momentous since it was the first time America's only harpsichord builders met. When did this happen?*

CHIASSON: 1938. I first learned of Challis from the little lady who lived across the street from the Bell Skinner Collection. Her duty was to come and open the door for you when visiting the collection. She told me about Challis and suggested that I write to him if I was at all interested in harpsichords. But I never got around to contacting him until he came east.

HANEY: *How much time passed until you made your second harpsichord?*

CHIASSON: About a year. Then a year after that, I built my third instrument. Both had lute stops and 16 foot choirs but with slightly reduced scale. They were **not** "monsters". They were an attempt to make a more elegant instrument. One of them was built for Margaret Mason a counterpoint professor at the conservatory. She made her debut on the instrument by playing the Bach D Minor Concerto with the Conservatory Orchestra. The other was made for a professor of economics. I left for World War II shortly after that and never returned to Boston except to visit. I settled in New York when I got out of uniform.

By that time Danny Pinkham had very nicely taken over the harpsichord playing business in Boston and I was very happy to leave Boston to him.

HANEY: *Did you have an opportunity to visit harpsichordists or harpsichord collections while you were in the service?*

CHIASSON: Not at all. With one wonderful exception. I had a 10-day leave and was able to visit John Challis. I stayed with him and had a

wonderful time. He was living in Ypsalenti at the time. He had this old place with a tremendous flight of stairs to the second floor. He was located over some stores which was the reason for the very high ceilings. The steps were endless but he had the entire floor and it was beautifully finished . . . a very nice place.

The second time I visited him he had moved to Detroit and was in his first Detroit house. The last time I visited him in Detroit I was on concert tour and was carrying my harpsichord in a station wagon. He was living in his second Detroit house at this time which was the house the new highway went through. That's when he said the hell with Detroit I'm going to New York. And that's what he did.

HANEY: *What did you do when you left the service?*

CHIASSON: Well I was in the service for more than five years, and not as a musician. I didn't even tell them I knew anything about music, I didn't want to use my background in that way. I was in cryptography and had nightmares that I would never get out. But I finally did and moved to New York. I had many friends there and was offered a place to stay while I caught my breath.

While I was catching my breath I was fortunate enough to meet a manager of one of the divisions of Columbia Inc., the community concert people and I signed up with them as a concert pianist.

I stayed with them for four years and traveled all over the United States. I remember playing in Denver in that 10,000 seat barn of yours which has a moveable divider back stage and another huge concert hall on the other side of that. I played there in February 1947 . . . in a blizzard and a fantastic thing happened to me.

I was staying in the magnificent Brown Palace Hotel, the one with the 10 story lobby, and decided to go out for a short walk. I had my head lowered because of the storm and I bumped into another man who had his head lowered also. I said pardon me

and as I looked up, he looked up too, and it was Sanroma my music professor back at the conservatory! He was playing in Denver at the same time, either the night before or the night after my concert. Both of our names were on the same billboard and we walked to the hall together!

HANEY: *The life of a traveling pianist is a rather difficult one I should think.*

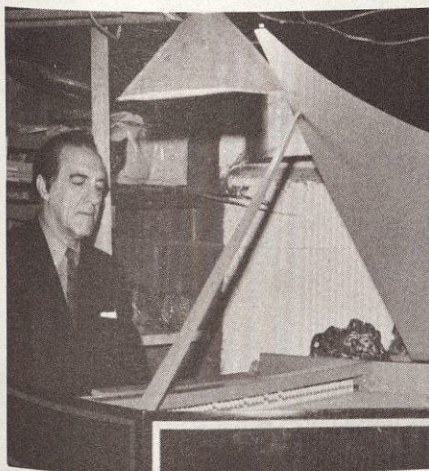
CHIASSON: Yes it is. One gets tired of it unless you are really top notch and the money makes it all worth while. So much of what you earn is spent while traveling. One can net more by staying home where expenses are not so high. I got tired of supporting hotels and restaurants in all parts of the country.

HANEY: *While you were on the road did you have time to think about harpsichord building?*

CHIASSON: No.

HANEY: *Where was your "monster"?*

CHIASSON: It was in Melville Smith's house in Cambridge. After four years on the road, I returned to New York and shared a workshop with a friend who had a rather complete set of tools. There I made four instruments which were exactly alike. All of my recordings were made on these instruments. They were all adaptations of a Taskan instrument. The tail was



A beautiful single-manual instrument gets a voice-test before leaving the shop. Since Chiasson has been a performing concert artist for many years he is well aware of the requirements of professional musicians.

actually from Hitchcock as well as some German instruments which have the rounded end.

At this same time, I was concertizing heavily in New York. I played in orchestras, gave solo concerts and had more than enough work. I was very busy as a player.

HANEY: *Was this the period that Bill Dowd met you?*

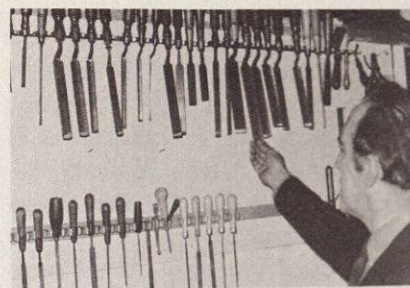
CHIASSON: No. We never met! He came to one of my concerts at the Boston Fine Arts Museum before the war and heard me there. I never played harpsichord in Boston after the war.

HANEY: *I assume this was the time you decided to start building harpsichords professionally. Since this was early in the harpsichord revival, did you have any nagging fears about your success at that time?*

CHIASSON: Yes indeed . . . constant fears. It's not something that is very comfortable to discuss. Please understand that I had no fear of the market. It was my own desire for quality which gave me pause. Of course I wanted to produce the finest instrument possible, and this concern is still with me today. The thing that has kept me going through the years is that hope that each new instrument will be better than the one just completed. And I constantly work toward that end.

It may seem strange to you but although I have been building harpsichords in America longer than almost anyone else, I have never built as a builder. It has been primarily an avocation for me rather than a vocation. Even so, building has been an important part of my life. A tragedy brought that graphically to my attention.

The workshop I was using was in a building which caught fire and that led to a discouraging period for me. It was a tremendous loss. At the time, there were three double manuals in the shop and one single manual lined up. All there were reduced to ashes. When so much work goes into each instrument they almost become part of you. Well, we all must adjust to these things and I gathered every-



This beautiful collection of wood chisels is indicative of the care Chiasson uses in constructing his instruments. These tools, many of them rare collectors items, are in regular daily use.

thing I could together and built two single manual double 8's.

At this time, my concertizing was occupying less of my time. Perhaps because of more competition. There were more harpsichordists around at this time and we shared the market. Valenti was very active as was Fuller. Things weren't going that well as far as my concerts were concerned and I was offered a position of organist and choirmaster in New Jersey. I decided to take it and moved to New Jersey to be nearer my work. After two years my students were growing in numbers and in the amount of time they required, so I resigned from the church and have devoted my full time to students from that time until today. My main income is from teaching. I teach both piano and harpsichord, give concerts from time to time, and continue to build harpsichords. Since I have this wonderful space in the country, I have my shop right here as part of my home. It is very difficult to have a shop in New York and live in New Jersey. A lot of time is wasted in commuting back and forth.

HANEY: *Where is your famous "monster" today?*

CHIASSON: I don't know. I really don't know. It fell into complete disrepair years ago and changed hands so often that I lost track of it. I suppose I could find it if I worked on it, but I'm really not too interested. My current instruments are far superior to that first effort. Even though I have always considered myself a performing musician who builds harpsichords, rather than a builder who

(Continued on page 12)

THIS beautiful instrument has been carefully cared for since its construction in 1693. Its maker is unknown, but the fact that it is Italian is unmistakable. Most obvious feature is the long, slender design which is typically Italian. It is a double cased instrument and the harpsichord can be removed from its decorative outer case. The trestle on which this instrument stands contains a shallow drawer immediately below the cheek board which held a tuning wrench, extra strings, etc., but no tuning fork since this instrument was built nearly two decades before the tuning fork was invented.

The painted case is beautifully designed and contains an imaginative selection of mythological figures and convoluted cartouches. The escutcheon in the center of the lid holds an Italian landscape complete with two waterfalls, five ships, mountains, a castle and two observers looking out over a calm sea from a rocky shore. The nude dancer painted on the hinged section of the lid is typical of the period. The use of angels with trumpets combined with beasts and flying monsters on the panel are especially interesting.

The lock on the cheek board was obviously added a number of years after the harpsichord was built. It is a crude work and was installed without concern for the cartouches it destroyed.

Many instruments of this type contained a stretcher rung between the front two legs of the stand. This did much for the stability of the trestle, but little for the comfort of the harpsichordist since it did not leave room for the artists feet and legs. This instrument was no exception, so sometime during its long life, someone simply sawed off the offending skinning stretcher, leaving an open front similar to contemporary harpsichords. The lid stick, and its unorthodox position, is probably not original since instruments of this period were often designed to be opened fully with the lid resting against a wall.

(Continued on page 12)



HARPICHORD *of* NOTE



The Harpsichord — 11



The clean beauty and simplicity of Italian design is apparent in this overhead view with the outer case removed. The long string lengths in the bass give a resonant sound yet the treble strings are short enough to maintain crispness. This instrument has two 8' choirs of strings with two hand stops. The stops are operated from the top (not the front or side) and behind the tuning pins. Rapid register changes were not needed or used. There was neither a buff stop nor a lute stop. The pure beauty of an unrestricted 8' tone could not be improved upon. The rose, which is small and very complex, acts as a beauty mark to emphasize the pristine form of the instrument which surrounds it. We are proud that this work of art is being preserved for future generations by Smithsonian Institution.

H.L.H.

CHAISSON

(Continued from page 9)

plays, I have finished 32 Chiasson instruments to date. Two of these, numbers 31 and 32 are ready for final voicing and number 33 is now under construction. At one time I used to make my own jacks of pearwood with holly tongues. I got the tongues and adjustment screws from Challis. However, now, I use jacks built by Eric Herz of Cambridge. It is a well-designed jack which is also used by Goble of Oxford. My instruments are very "alive" and are excellent for concert work. Just a few weeks ago I gave a recital in a school which had a lot of polished wood, tile and that sort of thing and the result was almost frightening it was so powerful.

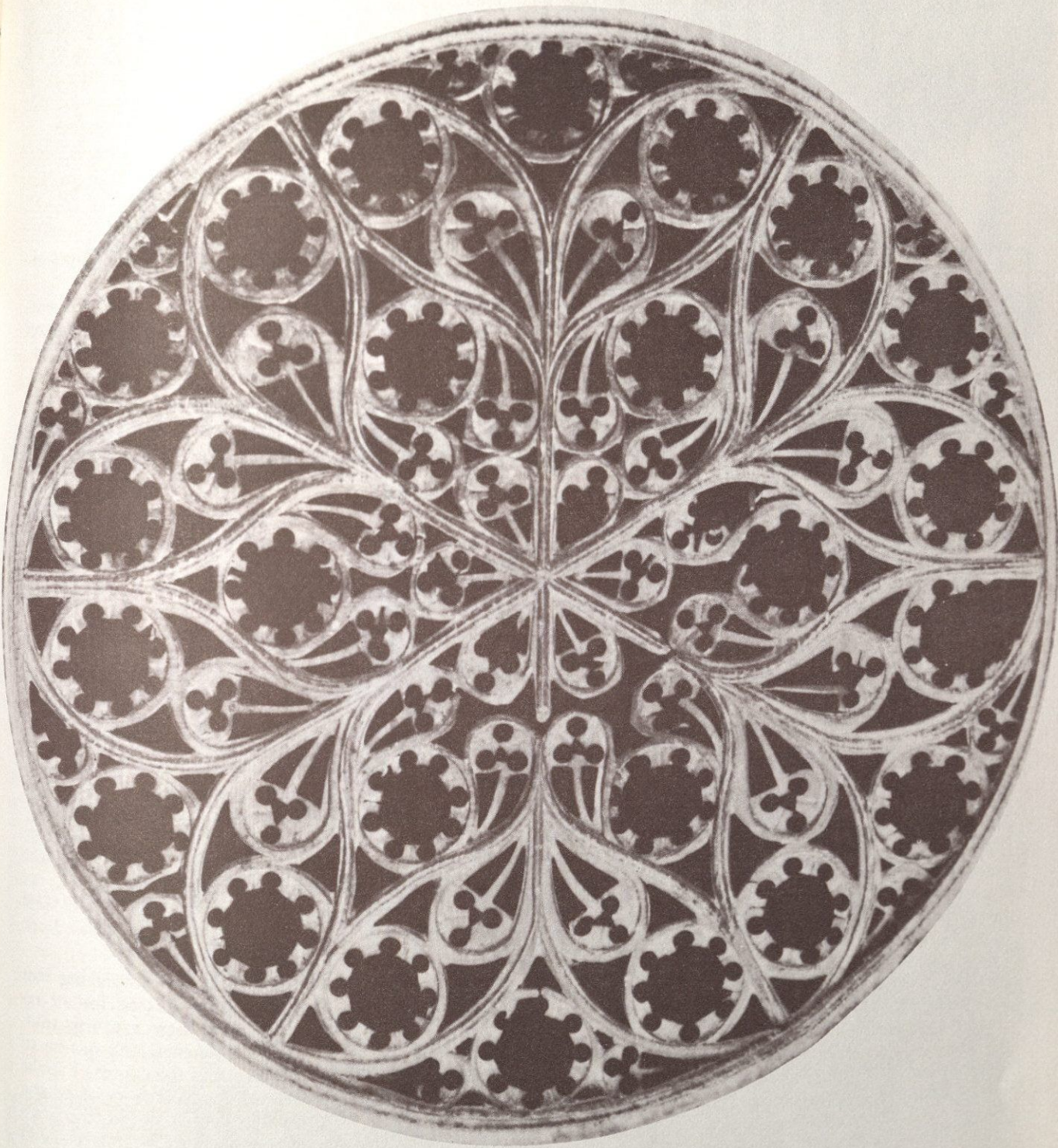
HANEY: *I notice that your program notes mention that you studied with Landawska. How did this come about?*

CHAISSON: When Landowska arrived in this country as a refugee, with a harpsichord and a secretary, she arrived on Pearl Harbor Day, 1941. I had my Christmas programs at church at Cambridge and couldn't get away until after the programs were out of the way. I took the first train I could, on a Sunday I believe, after my services and went to New York to meet Landawska. She was in a little run-down New York hotel, the Hotel Langwell which was right off Times Square. It was a dismal building with holes in the carpet. We had a long talk about many things. We shared the same friends and loved the same composers. During the course of conversation I asked her if she needed any money. At this her eyes filled with tears and she lowered her head and said "if you only knew the people I considered friends who have not thought to ask that question. No thank you, I do not need money. Victor has taken care of me. Royalties from the recordings."

This was right after Christmas and the following February she did that fabulous Town Hall Goldberg Variations. I had tickets to that concert but gave them to Daniel Pinkham

(Continued on page 20)

The Subject is Roses



This rose, greatly enlarged to show detail, was carved by an unknown artist for a 17th century virginal. You may copy this design for your own instrument by using a reducing pantograph to trace the design onto a piece of fine wood then removing the black areas with a drill, fine file and sharp knife.

the Stephen Keene Spinet

by ALDEI GREGOIRE

Mr. Stephen Keene, Maker of Harpsycons and Virginals, dwelleth now in Threadneedle Street at the sign of the Virginal, who maketh them exactly good, both for sound and substance.

THE above advertisement appeared in the sixth edition of John Playford's popular *Introduction to the Skill of Music*, published in 1672. At some time between that date and 1685, Londoner Stephen Keene, possibly with the help of his son, built a particularly beautiful spinet of French walnut, trimmed with holly and cypress, which somehow found its way to the American Colonies. It might be very romantic to know something of its early history, but we know only that it came to the Willard Manse in Deerfield, Massachusetts, was used and presumably enjoyed there for an indeterminate period of time, was eventually replaced by a newfangled Clementi square piano and exiled to either the attic or the barn. There it was the prey of destructive mice and even more destructive children. When it was finally given to the local museum in the latter half of the nineteenth century it dejectedly settled itself in a dark corner hoping, I'm sure, to escape detection. Its top was missing, its keyboard was lost except for two naturals and one sharp, all of its jacks had long since been scattered, its strings were completely gone, its case was open at all glued seams, its solid brass hardware had been consigned to other duties, and what little was left of its soundboard was hopelessly eroded by weather to half of its original thickness.

In the spring of 1950 I was intro-

duced to the Keene spinet, and it was decided that I should try to restore it. A search for missing parts, even one missing part which might give me a clue about materials or design, proved fruitless, so the spinet sat patiently in my shop while I chewed by fingernails and wondered about my sanity. This was no Babcock piano or even a Zumpe and Buntebart Hammerklavier; this was an instrument built before Bach was born, and for the first time in my life I felt afraid to begin a restoration. So I took off for New York as I usually do when I have a problem.

There seems to be very little biographical material on Mr. Stephen Keene. I certainly remembered nothing about him from anything I'd read, because, I suppose, Ruckers, Haward, Hitchcock, and a few others may be considered far more important builders, but I discovered during my first day at the 42nd Street Library that Keene was thoroughly respected by his contemporaries. I learned that his craftsmanship was excellent and that his sense of design was far better than either Hitchcock's or Haward's. The reason he is not so well known today could be that he wasn't so prolific as other builders or that fewer examples of his labor remain in existence.

Research

Half of each day of my week in New York was spent in the library. The result was a notebook crammed with material, some very interesting but entirely irrelevant, some absolutely worthless, a fair dribble of information which made it possible for me to plan a *modus operandi* and to know what materials I

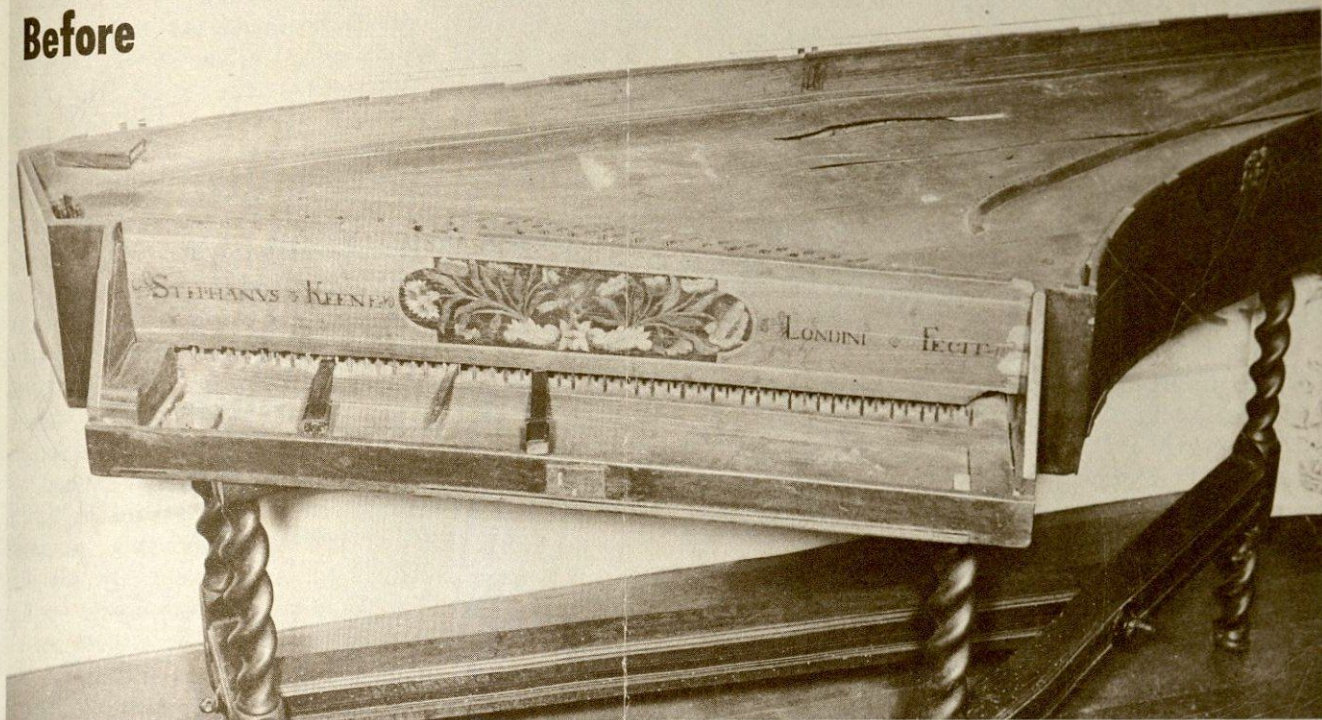
needed to procure, and five pages of lovely doodles.

My afternoons were mostly spent at the Metropolitan Museum, where I was reprimanded one day by the guard on duty in the Morgan Room for lightly plucking the string of the nun's fiddle. The string was easily half an inch in diameter and could have held up a locomotive. He was frightfully put out by my lack of respect and informed me that all the instruments there were very old and that I'd have to leave if I touched anything else. I assured him I'd cooperate, but he stayed within ten feet of me through my entire stay. The next day I was in the sanctum sanctorum where Mr. Moffitt, the remarkable expert in charge of musical instrument restorations, presides. There, surrounded by literally hundreds of priceless treasures dating back to the fourteenth century, I was allowed to browse practically at will. I did hesitate, however, whenever Mr. Moffitt handed over something for me to examine, because I imagined I could still feel that guard's hot breath on the back of my neck.

Perhaps the most stimulating fact I learned during this period of research was that there are apparently no other Stephen Keene spinets in America. None of the experts I spoke to knew of any, but it is of course conceivable that there may be some others reposing in attics or barns as was this Deerfield example. The impression I got from articles and papers that I read was, moreover, that there are apparently but very few left in England. Grove's *Dictionary* mentions three, two of about the same period and one of a later

(Continued on page 16)

Before



After



GREGOIRE

(Continued from page 14)

date.

(Editors Note: Since this article was written, evidence has been uncovered which indicates that Stephen Keene spinets are not as rare as originally believed. Boalch has located 16 spinets by Keene and one is currently for sale by Musica Antica in Chicago.)

Such a discovery made me all the more determined to use nothing but authentic materials, but in this day of plastic and other synthetic materials a determination such as this one can really get you into deep water. The first three wood suppliers I approached laughed at me when I asked for French walnut. Someone even said there was an embargo on the stuff. It was only after consulting with Mr. Moffitt of the Metropolitan Museum that I found my source of supply, at A. L. Wild's obscure but well-stocked shop on the lower East Side.

I understand the Bowery is now the center of the world's diamond industry. With the possible exception of Ivoryton, Connecticut, it's also perhaps the only American source of raw ivory. One afternoon I explored almost the entire Bowery before I found what I was looking for — a billiard ball manufacturer. He had just that week received a new shipment of ivory, and although I had worked with ivory for years I was fascinated by its appearance in the raw state. There were hundreds of tusks, all different in size, shape, and color, strewn about the floor of the shop. There was bull ivory and cow ivory, fine-grained and course-grained; some tusks were flawlessly symmetrical while others were scarred and even broken. After a half hour of standing about and letting my imagination run rampant through scenes of Kipling, I reluctantly left with my ten-pound package of ivory "points" wrapped in several layers of newsprint to insulate them against quick changes in temperature.

The actual restoration of the Keene spinet, once the necessary materials were assembled, was pretty much routine. Fortunately, I had

some hundred-year-old spruce which I uncached for the soundboard and ribs. Crow-quill for the plectra which pluck the strings is never much of a problem if you're surrounded by New England cornfields, and by farmers who simply throw away hog bristle at slaughtering time, (and buy paint brushes made of bristle that Chinese farmers didn't throw away). By way of explanation, the hog bristle acts as a sensitive spring which maintains the tongue, in which the crow-quill is inserted, in the necessary position for the quill to attack the string. Good crow-quill, properly seasoned in olive oil, has surprisingly longevity, but performers on the spinet should be able to replace and adjust their quills whenever the rather frequent breakdowns from broken quills occur.

One of the first and most important discoveries I made when I began to lay out the keyboard was that Keene had used a short-octave arrangement by cutting the lowest two sharps. This was apparent only from the arrangement of the balance pins, since all the keys were lost except three in the middle of the keyboard. One day, quite a long time after I had built the keyboard, when thumbing through my Groves I came unexpectedly upon a tuning scheme for this very cut-sharp device. In addition to the important revelation of exactly what values these cut-sharps must have, it also corroborated that the spinet was built before 1685, because Keene is said to have discarded cut-sharps in that year. For the benefit of those who do not know, a cut-sharp is ostensibly one key with a lateral cut through its middle; that is, in a line parallel to the front of the keyboard. Actually, however, there are two separate and independent keys which increase the range of the instrument without increasing the length of its keyboard. This always involves only the lowest end of the keyboard. By this method we get a range down to G rather than B and end up with a keyboard of the same size.

Beyond Description

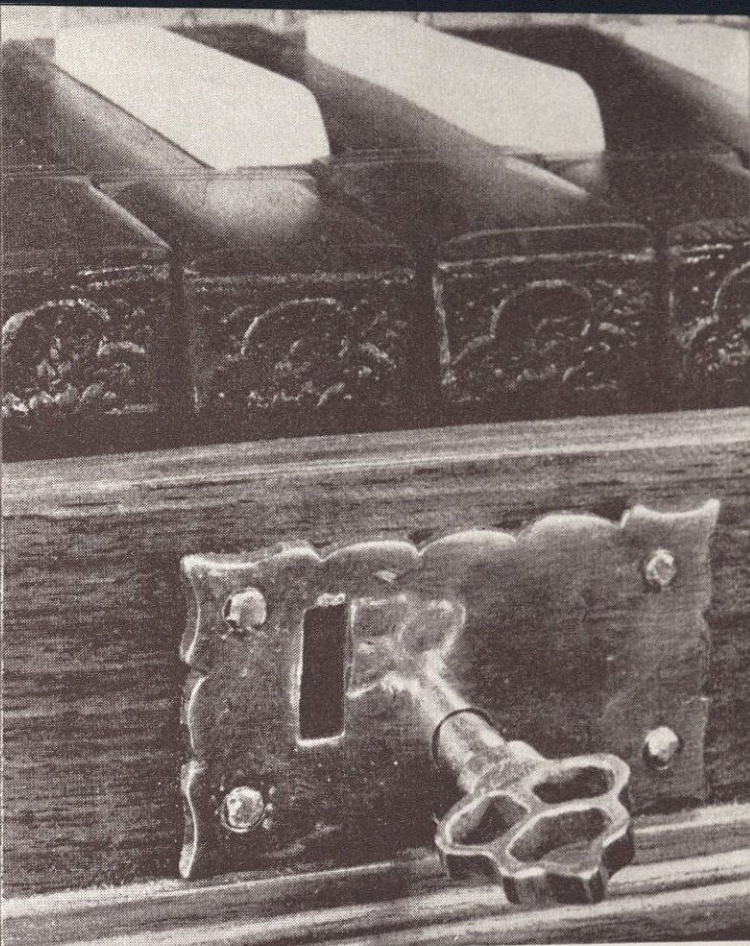
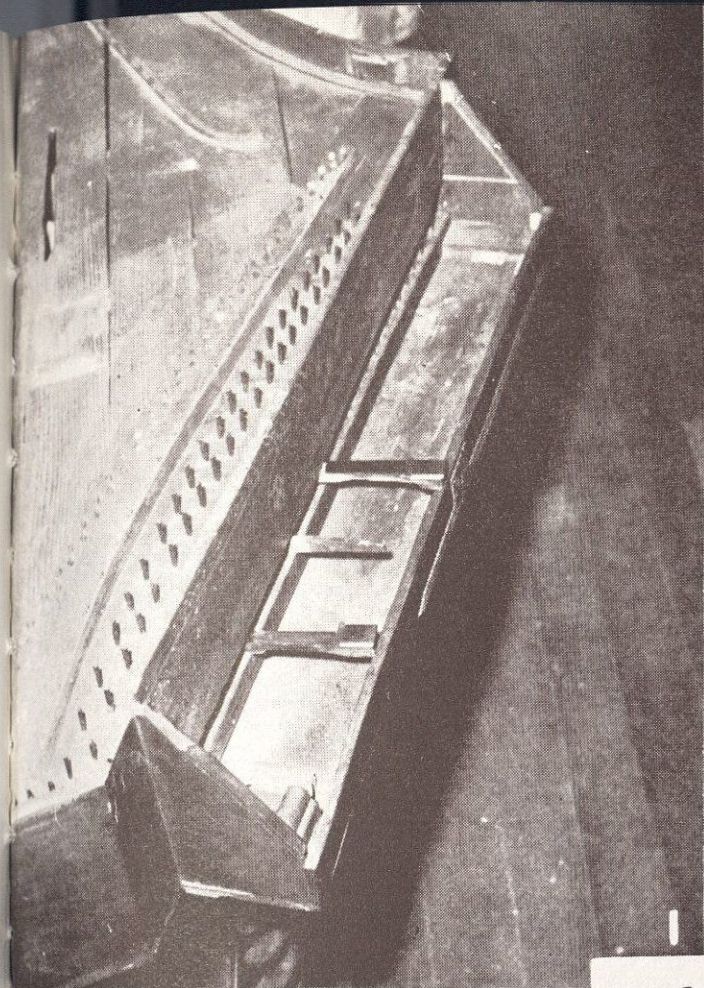
A description of the Keene Spinet

could never do it justice. One must see its lines and the patina of the wood to appreciate its beauty. The five-cornered case is French walnut with the exception of the back panel and bottom, which are oak and pine respectively. Cypress, inlaid with holly, comprises the inner surface trim, thump board, and inner case in the most discreet of simple designs. The cedar keys are overlaid with ebony for the naturals, and the sharps are solid ivory blocks. The key-fronts are tooled sheepskin painted black. The soundboard, as I have already said, is spruce, the mortise board is end-grained cypress, and the wrest-plank is beech. The jacks are pearwood, weighted with lead, and have holly tongues, crow-quill plectra, hog-bristle springs and felt dampers. The strings are all steel. Keene may have used half brass and half steel, but I found only vestiges of steel wire. The tone from these is beautifully lyrical and full. The amplitude of the instrument is remarkably large, but it would be much larger had Keene utilized a rose (decorative, perforated hole) in the soundboard or a soundway somewhere in the bottom. This is the only factor of design on which I disagree with Mr. Keene. I have decided to make reproductions of this instrument, and the only difference between them and the original will be the addition of the rose.

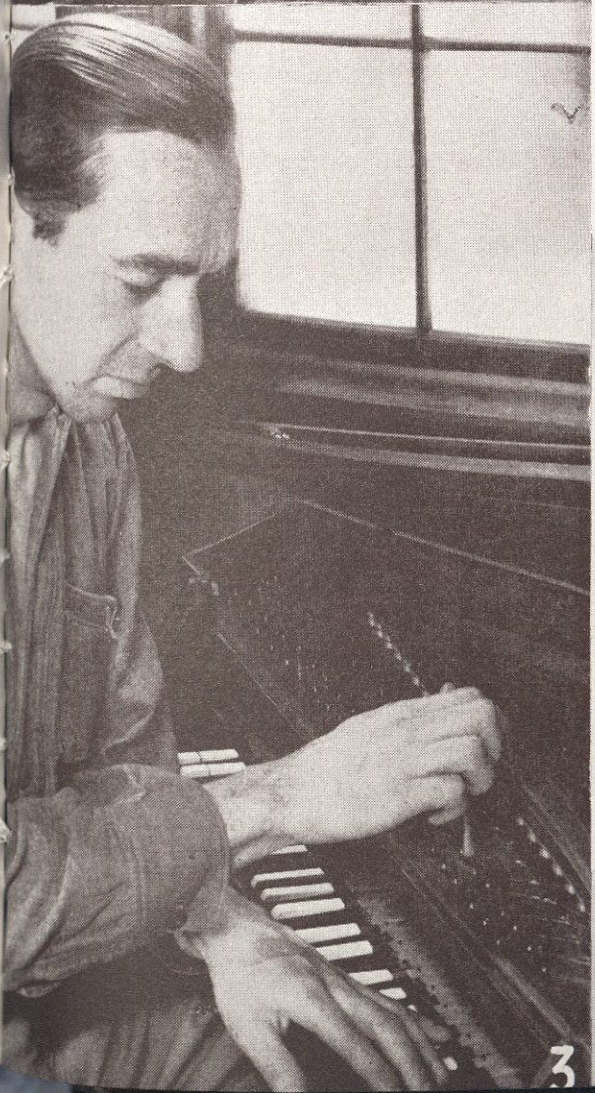
The case, which, incidentally, is 5 feet long, 2 feet through its greatest width, and 8 inches thick, weighs about 75 pounds and rests on a beechwood trestle of simple design. The legs of this trestle are Jacobean, I think. The handsome hardware, most of which had to be replaced, is brass.

Working on this spinet has been one of the greatest pleasures I have ever experienced. I feel inspired to perpetuate Stephen Keene's design by making replicas which will live in the homes of friends and give them pleasure. I can never adequately express my gratitude to Mr. Henry Flynt for making the restoration possible and to Mr. Paul Hawks, who felt for years that something should be done to make this beautiful instrument speak again.





1. The Keene spinet before restoration was begun.
2. Detail of keys and lock.
3. Mr. Gregoire doing a job of tuning.
4. The completed restoration—again a thing of beauty.



TRANSFER LETTERS MAKE TUNING PIN IDENTIFICATION EASY

Now available at any art goods or engineering store, rub-on letters applied to the wrest plank assist materially in identifying tuning pins during the tuning process. These inexpensive letters come in a variety of styles, sizes and several colors. The letters illustrated here are metallic gold and are quite handsome against the blond maple background. Letters should be affixed before final varnish is applied. Some plastic varnishes will melt or shrink some brands of transfer letters, so a pre-test is wise. Brand names include Deca-dry; Cello-tak; Letraset; Artype and Formatt.

FREQUENCY RATIOS FOR MEAN TONE SCALE.

by Dr. Allan F. Abrahamse

FREQUENCY RATIOS FOR MEAN TONE SCALE.

by Dr. Allan F. Abrahamse

Following is my chart of the frequencies of the first eight partials of the tones for Meantone Tuning. I have included the five enharmonic equivalents, in case you have a harpsichord with split sharps. These figures were computed in about 3 seconds by the IBM 360/65 in the Mathematics Department of USC.

MEAN TONE SCALE CYCLE OF FIFTHS — F below middle C to E above middle C

Note	Partial 1	Partial 2	Partial 3	Partial 4	Partial 5	Partial 6	Partial 7	Partial 8
G-flat	188.3173	376.6345	564.9518	753.2691	941.5863	1129.9036	1318.2209	1506.5382
D-flat	281.6000	563.2000	844.8000	1126.4000	1408.0000	1689.6000	1971.2000	2252.8000
A-flat	210.5451	421.0902	631.6353	842.1804	1052.7255	1263.2707	1473.8158	1684.3609
E-flat	314.8384	629.6767	944.5151	1259.3535	1574.1919	1889.0302	2203.8686	2518.7070
B-flat	235.3966	470.7932	706.1898	941.5863	1176.9829	1412.3795	1647.7761	1883.1727
F	176.0000	352.0000	528.0000	704.0000	880.0000	1056.0000	1232.0000	1408.0000
C	263.1814	526.3628	789.5442	1052.7255	1315.9069	1579.0883	1842.2697	2105.4511
G	196.7740	393.5480	590.3219	787.0959	983.8699	1180.6439	1377.4179	1574.1919
D	294.2457	588.4915	882.7372	1176.9829	1471.2287	1765.4744	2059.7201	2353.9659
A	220.0000	440.0000	660.0000	880.0000	1100.0000	1320.0000	1540.0000	1760.0000
E	328.9767	657.9535	986.9302	1315.9069	1644.8837	1973.8604	2302.8371	2631.8139
B	245.9675	491.9350	737.9024	983.8699	1229.8374	1475.8049	1721.7723	1967.7398
F-sharp	183.9036	367.8072	551.7108	735.6143	919.5179	1103.4215	1287.3251	1471.2287
C-sharp	275.0000	550.0000	825.0000	1100.0000	1375.0000	1650.0000	1925.0000	2200.0000
G-sharp	205.6105	411.2209	616.8314	822.4418	1028.0523	1233.6627	1439.2732	1644.8837
D-sharp	307.4593	614.9187	922.3780	1229.8374	1537.2967	1844.7561	2152.2154	2459.6748
A-sharp	229.8795	459.7590	689.6384	919.5179	1149.3974	1379.2769	1609.1564	1839.0358

FREQUENCY CHART FOR MEAN TONE TUNING

A-flat	1.9140464400	F-sharp	1.6718507624	D-sharp	1.3975424859	C	1.1962790250
G-sharp	1.8691859765	F	1.6000000000	D	1.3374806100	B	1.1180339887
G	1.7888543820	E	1.4953487812	D-flat	1.2800000000	B-flat	1.0699844880
G-flat	1.7119751807	E-flat	1.4310835056	C-sharp	1.2500000000	A-sharp	1.0449067265
						A	1.0000000000

CHAISSON (Cont. from page 12)
since my father had just passed away.
That concert made history.

I went into the service shortly after that and, while in uniform, each time I was in New York I would go to Landowska and have a lesson. I ended up visiting her in her country house in Lakeville Connecticut, which is where she died.

HANEY: *What are your impressions of Landowska?*

CHAISSON: She was incredible. She was always, absolute kindness. She was always so eager to find the little things that were good and praise it, and make it grow. Never mind the rest. We all make mistakes. That third note was good, never mind the rotten one just after it. She was very, very kind. I look back on the relationship with great fondness. I adored her. I haven't buried her yet.

There are people who criticize Landowska for sounding Polish and pianistic. A Pole should play Bach like a German? I've heard German's play Bach . . . no thank you!

HANEY: *Do you lean towards French composers? I notice that many of your programs are all French.*

CHAISSON: I have been somewhat trapped into it, in a way. I'm very fond of any note of harpsichord music which is French to begin with because I am French. I was brought up very much in a French culture. I've done a great deal of Bach, Hayden, Mozart. As a pianist, I am very much of a Chopin and Debussy fan. I've worked on about 200 of the Scarlatti Sonatas. Most of my recordings have been of French music. My recordings "French Masters of the Harpsichord" and my Couperin record have just been re-issued recently.

HANEY: *What do you foresee for the future, particularly your future?*

CHAISSON: Of course, no one knows, but I plan to continue building instruments as I have been doing for these many years. Each one hopefully better than the last. My students give me great joy and I will continue concertizing when time permits. My life here in the country is a happy one and I look forward to it continuing that way.

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